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Newport, R.I.**

**ORGANIZING FOR INTERAGENCY SUCCESS
AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract

Organizing for Interagency Success at the Regional Level

The challenge of effective interagency cooperation at the operational level is one that must be overcome as the United States adapts to new and different threats in the 21st Century. Current difficulties in Iraq, and in other operations in the recent past highlight inadequacies in the current national security system. This paper proposes one part of a solution to the interagency problem in the form of a restructuring of the United States national security organization at the regional level. Drawing on current and proposed improvements to the current system, and focusing on the role of the combatant commander, it outlines the organization of the proposed Regional Interagency Teams (RIAT), led by senior civilian executives who are imbued with the authority and organizational flexibility to task-organize and direct all the instruments of national power in their region (including military) to support national strategic objectives. It outlines the need for such a change, and explores some of the parallel changes that must take place in government in order to enable its implementation. Finally, it addresses several potential counterarguments, addressing each in turn.

According to the current United States National Security Strategy, “The major institutions of American national security were designed in a different era to meet different challenges. They need to be transformed.”¹ In other words, the national security system of today, as formed after World War II by the National Security Act of 1947, and revised by the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, is ill-suited to meet the challenges to United States security in the 21st Century. The focus of much debate is the frequent inability of the various agencies within the executive branch to work together to achieve national objectives – the “interagency” problem. Citing examples of US policy poorly executed by disparate government agencies acting with little or no coordination among them, many in the national security community have called for reform. Dr. James Carafino is one of them, and contends the greatest need for change is at the operational level:

If there is a problem that needs to be fixed, it is this—the ability to coordinate major interagency challenges outside of Washington, away from the offices of Cabinet secretaries and staffs, whether it is coordinating disaster relief over a three-state area after a hurricane or conducting the occupation of a foreign country.²

In this paper I will outline one potential part of a broader solution to the problem described above. Specifically, I contend that interagency unity of effort at the operational level can be much improved by the creation of permanent, Regional Interagency Teams (RIAT), under the direction of senior civilian executives who are imbued with the authority and organizational flexibility to task-organize and direct all the instruments of national power in their region (including military) to support national strategic objectives.

I begin by examining two cases of recent military operations that were characterized by poor interagency coordination at the operational level. Operations

Uphold Democracy and Iraqi Freedom were conducted almost ten years apart, and were quite different from one another in scope and outcome, but both serve to illustrate the problem of interagency coordination and how it can be improved by the RIAT concept. Next, I will examine some steps that the Department of Defense has undertaken to improve interagency cooperation in its operations, namely the establishment of Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATFs), Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACGs), and the “interagency combatant command,”³ and explain why these steps, although they are steps in the right direction, fall short of the fundamental level of reform necessary. Finally, I provide a more detailed description of the proposed RIAT organization, and a discussion of its impact on current roles and responsibilities in the Department of Defense and other agencies.

Uphold Democracy

A case study of Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti in 1994, conducted by a workshop organized for the National Defense University’s Center for Advanced Concepts and Technology provides some examples of the recurring problems caused by a lack of coordination at the operational level. Although Uphold Democracy was a successful operation overall in that it accomplished the stated objectives, such success occurred despite poor interagency coordination at the operational level.⁴ Coordination at the strategic level, although initially cumbersome, was effective enough to provide a framework for success.⁵ At the tactical level, adequate coordination was achieved, but only during execution, and not as a result of operational planning.⁶

Workshop participants identified several problems that plagued the planning for the operation, and developed lessons learned pertaining to interagency coordination. For

example, although there existed adequate discussion among agencies at the strategic level, an integrated, detailed civil-military operation plan was never produced. Policy debate at the strategic level delayed effective interagency planning at the operational level.⁷ In addition, there was some initial confusion surrounding interagency logistics support. In one instance, key USAID personnel were left without transportation to Haiti because of a lack of coordination with the military.⁸ Also, military planners had based part of their plan on the assumption that civilian agencies would immediately respond with nation-building and economic aid, which turned out to be false.⁹ Finally, command relationships between military and civilian agencies on the ground in Haiti were ambiguous and ad-hoc, such that, “neither the force commander nor the ambassador had total command of the situation.”¹⁰

As stated in the case study, lessons learned included the need for both a more formal interagency planning doctrine, and an agreement on interagency command and control arrangements.¹¹ Both of these needs can be met, in part, by establishing permanent interagency teams at the regional, theater-strategic and operational levels. If interagency planning teams are a permanent part of the US regional security apparatus, then a formal planning doctrine can logically emerge as a byproduct of the ongoing planning efforts of those teams. As for command and control arrangements, the restructuring of the regional security system would create an unambiguous chain of command that includes all government agencies involved in such operations.

The difficulties encountered in coordinating across government agencies to plan and execute Uphold Democracy, although significant, did not lead to failure of the operation. This may be due, in part, to the fact that DoD planners were mindful of lessons learned from previous operations in Grenada and Panama, prompting a greater level of interagency

coordination for this operation than in the past.¹² Despite such efforts, there remains much that can be done to achieve a level of coordination necessary for continued success in nation building operations.

Iraqi Freedom

The more recent case of the postwar reconstruction and transition in Iraq exposed additional problems in the implementation of policy across agency lines at the operational level. Analysis of the postwar situation as it has unfolded in the last few years is ongoing, and encompasses a broad range of issues, not just interagency coordination. However, the lack of a permanent interagency command structure arguably led to the mishandling of the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq. More precisely, the designation of the Department of Defense as the lead agency for reconstruction led to the marginalization of other government agencies in the postwar effort, with serious consequences.¹³

For example, the US State Department in the run-up to the war had conducted extensive coordination and planning for postwar Iraq in an effort known as the “Future of Iraq Project.”¹⁴ Initially, the head of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (OHRA), Jay Garner, who was charged with leading the initial reconstruction effort by the Secretary of Defense, intended to incorporate parts of the Future of Iraq Project into his plan, and include the principal architect of that plan, Tom Warrick, as a key member of his staff.¹⁵ The Future of Iraq Project was led by the State Department, but drew from a wide range of government agencies and a group of Iraqi exiles. It was an attempt to include Iraqi views on everything from de-Baathification and security to the establishment of a new Iraqi government. Whether the plan would have worked or not is debatable, but the fact is it was never given a chance. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld directed Garner to “ignore” it and

exclude Warrick from his staff.¹⁶ This decision was apparently based on an ongoing feud between the Departments of Defense and State as to how to handle postwar reconstruction.¹⁷ Had the Defense Department not been the lead agency for implementation of postwar policy, perhaps the State Department and other agencies would have had a greater voice in the planning and execution of that critical phase of the operation, avoiding at least some of the mistakes made during that phase.

While the State Department had crafted a transition and reconstruction plan over the better part of a year, the Department of Defense did not establish the ORHA and appoint Garner to lead it until January 20th, 2003, two months before the start of the war.¹⁸ Both the ORHA and the organization that later replaced it, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), were ad-hoc organizations made up of mostly young, inexperienced staffs.¹⁹ Within the CPA, the high turnover of personnel contributed to a lack of consistency and focus in dealing with ongoing issues.²⁰ Had a permanent interagency staff existed in the region, there would have been a ready pool of experienced personnel, familiar with local regional issues, present over the long term, who could form the core of an organization like the CPA.

Several authors who have written about the handling of postwar Iraq assert that Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, the head of the CPA, although highly regarded and accomplished in his field, apparently lacked understanding of the political and cultural situation in Iraq, as evidenced by his controversial decisions to implement de-Baathification and disband the Iraqi army.²¹ Had there been a senior civilian executive already in place, permanently assigned to the region and therefore more familiar with the dynamics in Iraq, perhaps better decisions would have been made.

One can only speculate as to whether or not the existence of an organization such as the RIAT in the Persian Gulf region would have led to success in the reconstruction of Iraq in 2003. There are many factors that have created the situation as it exists today, but a detailed examination of all of them is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the existence of a RIAT in this case would have improved the odds of success, simply because it reduces ambiguity in the chain of command and provides a framework in which each federal agency can contribute its expertise to help solve complex problems like those encountered in Iraq.

Recent Efforts at Improvement

There have been a number of organizational changes suggested to alleviate the problems of interagency coordination at the operational level. Some possible solutions within the framework of existing law are already being implemented in the national security system. The Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) and Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) concepts have emerged in the last few years in response to the challenges of interagency cooperation at the combatant command and Joint Task Force levels. There are currently two Joint Interagency Task Forces operating under two different combatant commands. JIATF-South is a subordinate command of United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), and JIATF-West is a subordinate command of United States Pacific Command (USPACOM). Both organizations are primarily tasked with counter-drug operations and focus primarily on coordination among military and law enforcement agencies. Another JIATF was formed more recently in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. JIATF CounterTerrorism (JIATF-CT) enabled close coordination among military, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies in the fight against Al Qaeda.

Although counterdrug operations were not the focus of this organization, it remained largely a military and law enforcement-centric organization.²²

The Joint Interagency Coordination Group concept is an expansion of the JIATF concept designed to provide the combatant commander a means to coordinate all operations within his Area of Responsibility (AOR) across interagency lines.²³ Along with the Political Advisor (POLAD), the JIACG is designed to provide input from agencies outside the Department of Defense (DoD) to the planning process through policy implementation. It is an advisory group with a focus on coordination and collaboration.²⁴ Although broader in scope and more permanent in nature than the JIATF, the JIACG remains an advisory group within the military's combatant command structure. Participation in a JIACG by other government agencies is not mandatory, and the limited funding and staff resources of many of those agencies can severely limit the effective implementation of the concept.²⁵

Recently, the concept of an interagency combatant command has gained some exposure within the Department of Defense.²⁶ By expanding the roles and responsibilities of non-military federal agencies within the combatant command structure, the interagency command structure as proposed by LtCol Christopher Naler provides for unprecedented integration of military and other government agencies at the operational level.

Naler proposes two key changes in the organization of the combatant command's headquarters and staff. First is the creation of two deputy commander billets, one military and one civilian, with separate but equal responsibilities and authority within the command. The military deputy commander would be a DoD O-9; the civilian deputy commander would be an experienced senior State Department executive. The second key organizational change is a complete restructuring of the principal staff directorates. Instead of the current J-code

directorates, Naler's proposed structure divides staff functions into eight elements (six functional directorates, plus a standing JTF headquarters and a JIACG) that integrate traditional military functions with various non-military functions that are nonetheless an important part of the combatant commander's security mission. Naler names the directorates as Personnel and Resources, Information and Intelligence, Financial/Economic Development and Requirements/Acquisitions, Cultural Communications, Legal and Environmental Health, and Strategy and Operations. The standing JTF headquarters and JIACG do not differ significantly from their current form. Some of the directorates would be headed by a military officer, with a civilian executive as the deputy, while others would be led by a civilian, with a military deputy. For example, the Directorate of Financial/Economic Development and Requirements/Acquisitions would be led by a Treasury Department or Commerce Department executive with a military officer as his deputy. It would incorporate the current J-7, J-8, and J-9 staff functions of the combatant command, but its primary function would be economic development within the Area of Responsibility (AOR).²⁷

Although Naler argues that a revision of federal law would facilitate the implementation of his model for the interagency combatant command, the proposed structure of the newly formed United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) incorporates some of his ideas, namely the concept of the civilian deputy commander, while still being formed within the boundaries of the current law. As the newest of the unified commands comes on line, it is being touted as the first command to be formed from the outset with an "interagency perspective."²⁸ The organizational structure of AFRICOM is still in development at the time this paper is being written; as such, very few details of its command and staff organization are currently available to researchers. The interagency combatant

command as Naler envisions it, particularly the thorough integration of non-military agencies into a reorganized staff structure, promises a vast improvement over the current organizational model. Although Naler's concept represents a significant change in the way the United States organizes to implement national security policy at the regional level, it is not a fundamental change to the structure established under current law, in that the combatant commander retains all of his current authority and responsibilities, and the chain of command from the President to the combatant commander remains unchanged.

The Geographic Combatant Commander- A Role in Need of Change

Although the three initiatives described above are all positive steps toward more effective interagency cooperation, I believe they fall short of the level of change required. Central to the type of fundamental reform needed at the regional level is a change in the role of the military's Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC). The role of the GCC in the current national security system, including the emergent interagency combatant command in Africa is problematic for several reasons. The lack of a regional executive responsible for overall coordination of all instruments of national power in the implementation of a regional security strategy causes that responsibility, by default, to fall on the shoulders of the GCC. As such, although implementation of foreign policy at the country level is led by an ambassador and his country team, at the regional level, the de facto "face" of US foreign policy is a military one. This leads to two major problems. First, the GCC, ostensibly a strictly military actor, is required to engage in historically non-military endeavors. Diplomatic negotiations, international cooperation initiatives, etc. shift the focus of the GCC and his staff from execution of the military arm of US policy, to helping to shape that policy and directing non-military as well as military actions in support of that policy. And no

matter how talented or intelligent the GCC may be, his approach to regional security issues will always be heavily influenced by military experience and culture. While this is expected and desired in a military commander, it may in fact be a liability when it comes to solving non-military problems at the regional level.

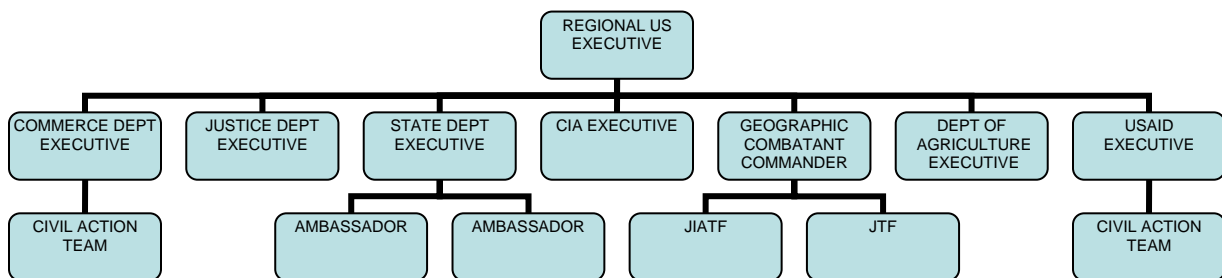
Second, the prominence of the GCC on the diplomatic stage sends a signal, intentional or not, that the United States chooses to interact with other nations on a regional level first and foremost with its military. Although the State Department, through its ambassadors, is constantly engaged one-on-one with individual countries, it is a mere interloper in the shadow of the ever-present Department of Defense at the regional level. The result may be a perception, accurate or not, in many parts of the world that American policy serves military interests, not vice-versa. This would explain, in part, the adverse reaction many African nations have had to the creation of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM). Some of those nations recently expressed concern that the creation of AFRICOM is a precursor to increased American military activity on the continent.²⁹ The fact that AFRICOM will be the first interagency combatant command does not do much to dispel this concern, because it remains a military entity, in both form and function. If, however, a regional security team were established in Africa, with the military component just one of many government agencies under the direct control of a civilian executive, then perceptions of bold military ambitions in the region would be easier to assuage.

Recently, a number of more radical ideas as to how to solve the interagency problem have been published. Major Tim Tenne argues that the combatant commander should be subordinate to a civilian counterpart at the regional level, and that the Department of State and US Agency for International Development (USAID) require a drastic increase in funding

in order to be effective in today's global security environment.³⁰ Major Sunil Desai outlines a system of "regional ambassadors" in the State Department who would oversee the work of all US embassies in the region. He advocates aligning the regional organizational structures of the State and Defense departments, and creating one interagency doctrine for national security. Finally, Desai envisions interagency task forces led by a civilian who lacks strong ties to any one agency, but is familiar with the workings of many, such as a former elected official.³¹ Each of these ideas, I believe, can help solve some of the problems described thus far, and are incorporated into the concept of the Regional Interagency Team.

The Regional Interagency Team

The regional interagency team should be organized as depicted in the diagram below. The basic structure is illustrated using only some of the agencies that might comprise a regional team. Actual team organizations would look somewhat different, since each region is different from the other in terms of US interests and involvement.



At the head of the organization is the Regional US Executive. He is a senior government official appointed by, and reporting directly to, the President of the United States, responsible for directing the efforts of all US executive agencies in the region (including military and diplomatic) in accordance with the regional US strategy. He is supported by a permanent staff with representatives from each of the agencies under his control. He is not a policy

maker, but can provide policy advice to the President in matters affecting his region of responsibility. He should not have strong ties to any one agency, as this may adversely affect his ability to balance the concerns of all agencies under his charge. For this reason, former high-level elected officials or private sector executives would be likely candidates to fill the position.

The Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) reports directly to the Regional US Executive, the first rung in his chain of command. The GCC is responsible for implementing the military part of the regional strategy. The structure of the combatant command below the GCC remains the same, with both service components and task forces working directly for him.

The State Department regional executive also answers directly to the US Regional Executive. He is the lead diplomat in the organization, and oversees the operations of all US embassies in the region. Every other agency that operates in the region is also led by a regional executive subordinate to the US Regional Executive.

While the GCC may organize JTFs or JIATFs to fulfill specific military missions, other agency regional executives may organize Civil Action Teams (CATs) in a similar fashion in order to fulfill missions that are primarily non-military in nature. These interagency groups are task-organized and established on an as-needed basis. JTFs or JIATFs may be tasked by the Regional US Executive with supporting CATs, or vice-versa.

In this model, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) is no longer a part of the GCC's chain of command. However, the chain of command for functional combatant commanders remains the same. The SECDEF provides resources, through the services, to the GCC, and remains responsible for national defense policy at the national strategic level. Other agency

executives and cabinet secretaries also provide personnel and resources to the Regional US Executives, who retain control of those resources in the execution of regional policy.

In order for the proposed structure to work as envisioned, there are certain “implied tasks” that must be addressed. They are: alignment of regional divisions across all agencies and departments, establishment of interagency personnel doctrine, education, and infrastructure, and reallocation of resources to agencies other than Defense. Alignment of regional lines is necessary because currently the State Department is organized into regional bureaus which are incongruous with the GCC Areas of Responsibility under the Unified Command Plan. Interagency reform will require new interagency doctrine, education, and infrastructure, just as joint doctrine and education were instrumental in the implementation of defense reform. Finally, the State Department and other agencies cannot provide the resources to support the regional interagency team concept without significant increases in funding. Each of these tasks will not be easy to accomplish, and the best way to accomplish them is a topic for further discussion beyond the scope of this paper.

Counterarguments

Creation of the RIAT organization as outlined above would be a significant change to the current national security structure, and as such, gives rise to valid concerns about its impact on the military’s roles and capabilities. I have identified four possible points of contention that warrant discussion here.

The first is that the Regional Executive in this model would be imbued with too much power. One can argue that only the President of the United States, a duly-elected official, should have direct control over such a broad representation of the instruments of national power. However, the RIAT concept does not usurp the President’s authority, since the

Regional Executive would be appointed by, and work directly for the President. The President still sets national policy – the Regional Executive simply ensures it is carried out at the regional level. In addition, requiring confirmation by the Senate of the Regional Executive nominees could help to alleviate such concerns.

Second, the authority and power of the Secretary of Defense and other cabinet secretaries is diminished under the RIAT system. This is a valid point, but the fact that this is true does not necessarily mean that it is bad. Part of the problem of interagency coordination can be traced to the “stovepipe” organization of the executive departments, just as the different military department “stovepipes” inhibited joint operations in the past. In the case of the military, the creation of combatant commands weakened the authority of the service chiefs in order to facilitate a more robust joint capability. Likewise, the creation of Regional Interagency Teams weakens the authority of cabinet secretaries in order to foster better interagency coordination.

Third, if the US found itself embroiled in a large-scale conventional military campaign or world war that crossed regional boundaries, then the RIAT structure would hinder effective military operations and violate the principle of unity of command. This concern is not without merit. However, such a situation is at most a rare exception, rather than the rule, for US security efforts in the world today. Also, in anticipation of such large-scale, widespread warfare, the national security reform legislation could include a “War Emergency” clause that the President could invoke to temporarily consolidate US military forces worldwide under a single command (perhaps the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) for the duration of the war, temporarily suspending the Regional Security Executives’ command of military forces.

Fourth, the Defense Department is the only agency with the resources and capabilities to manage multiple government agencies efforts at the regional level. This is currently true, but it need not, and should not, be true in the future. Other departments must be given the resources and capabilities necessary to carry out the functions at a regional level that are needed from them, so that the Defense Department can focus on fulfilling its military role.

Conclusion

The challenge of effective interagency coordination at the operational level is one that must be overcome as the United States adapts to new and different threats in the 21st century. The current difficulties in Iraq, and in other operations in the recent past highlight inadequacies in the current national security system. Although some positive steps have been taken in an attempt to better integrate military and non-military efforts in the execution of policy within the current system, broader and more fundamental change is necessary. The RIAT concept is but one part of what should be a comprehensive modernization of the way our government deals with the issues of national security. It does not guarantee that policymakers will enact sound policy, nor that those who implement that policy will do so wisely. Rather, it provides a framework at the theater strategic and operational levels that enables more focused, closely coordinated execution of national security policy across the entire range of military and non-military operations. It extends the American tradition of civilian control of the military beyond our borders, and in doing so, reassures our global neighbors that our military serves as only one of many instruments serving a comprehensive global security policy. Finally, it recognizes the need to dedicate more resources to the non-military players in the national security arena whose contributions are vital to success in current and future endeavors.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography)

- ¹ U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 43
- ² Carafano, "Herding Cats," 3.
- ³ Naler, "Are We Ready?" 26.
- ⁴ Hayes and Wheatley, *Interagency and Political-Military Dimensions*, 25.
- ⁵ Ibid., 26.
- ⁶ Ibid., 27.
- ⁷ Ibid., 32.
- ⁸ Ibid., 37.
- ⁹ Ibid., 38.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 55.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 57.
- ¹² Ibid., 49.
- ¹³ Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 292.
- ¹⁴ Phillips, *Losing Iraq*, 127.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 128.
- ¹⁷ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 103.
- ¹⁸ Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 30.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 32.
- ²⁰ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 204.
- ²¹ Ibid., 163.
- ²² Dunning, "Joint Interagency Coordinating Group," 92.
- ²³ CJCS, *JPUB 3-08*, II-20.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Dunning, "Joint Interagency Coordinating Group," 92.
- ²⁶ Naler, "Are We Ready?" 26.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 28
- ²⁸ McMichael, "Africa Command."
- ²⁹ Pessin, "African Officials Express Concerns."
- ³⁰ Tenne, "Military Can't Do it All,"
- ³¹ Desai, "Solving the Interagency Puzzle," 4-8.

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